



DEP Lake Assessment Section

Date: 31 January, 2001

To: Natural Resources Committee

From: Roy Bouchard, DEP Lakes Assessment Section

re: Aquatic Invasive Species Report

Under LD 2851, the last legislature required DEP and IFW to report on six areas related to invasive species introductions in Maine. A working group composed of these two agencies, plus DAFRR, DOC and several non-governmental groups has drafted a report which outlines the basic needs for a credible approach to the problem. The material below is from the draft report.

The introduction of non-indigenous invasive plant and animal species to the United States has been escalating with widespread destructive consequences. Until now Maine has been spared the worst introductions, but this will not last. Significant habitat disruption, loss of native plant and animal communities, loss of property values, reduced fishing and water recreation opportunities and large public/private expenditures have accompanied invasive plant introductions in all of the lower 48 states except Maine. There is a lack of strong leadership to coordinate the efforts of State agencies and other organizations that will be effected by the introduction of Invasive Aquatic Species (IAS). The work group recommends moving this issue to a level commensurate with its threat to Maine's environmental and economic health.

The report focusses on the following items:

I. "Identification of other biological threats to the State's waters including invasive animal species that may become a nuisance."

- Future biological threats exist from a number of non-native invasive plant and animal species that are not addressed by L.D. 2581. There are as many as 45 invasive aquatic species in Maine at this time, several of which are known to cause problems. In addition to the 11 plant species already identified in LD 2851, there are at least another eight animal or other

species which are likely to cause problems if introduced. The degree to which each of these poses a threat, mechanisms for their introduction and effective means of reducing their spread has not been fully investigated to date. Some, like zebra mussels, have both the potential for tremendous destructive effects but also some avenues for prevention which could be allied with invasive plant prevention efforts. Others, like certain microorganisms, present potentially less danger but are harder to prevent and control. The work group recommends creating a permanent Invasive Species Committee (ISC) which would answer to the LWRC. The responsibility of the Invasive Species Committee would be to develop a comprehensive “Invasive Aquatic Species Management Plan” that would identify and prioritize aquatic nuisance species threats, coordinate introduction prevention efforts, public education programs, and IAS abatement measures statewide. The development of an IAS Management Plan would qualify Maine for Federal funds that target invasive aquatic species issues.

II. “Further education, awareness and prevention efforts needed to stop the introduction and spread of invasive species;”

The work group recommends IAS education initially focus on the following areas:

- Establish an effective, consistent message to raise public IAS awareness.
- Continue to develop a public awareness campaign designed to reach a wide range of target audiences.
- Train a volunteer network of ‘Weed Watchers’ to monitor lakes and provide continuing education at the community level.
- Secure operating funds and human resources to meet the extensive list of educational needs listed in the report.

III. “Methods to control the spread of invasive species should any become established in the State, including quarantine authority;”

The work group recommends IAS control measures be initially focused in the following areas:

- Identify the means to document the extent of IAS through strategic surveys in high-risk areas.
- Establish a rapid response capability, including funds that would be available quickly to cover the costs of control for recently identified containable infestations.

- Develop a set of standards and guidelines that state and local governments and conservation groups may use to control established infestations.
- Establish a new formal process to manage access in infested waters.

IV. “Enforcement of the prohibitions in the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 38, section 419-C;”

The work group recommends modifying current IAS enforcement provisions as follows:

- Remove the requirement to prove intent to transport aquatic weeds in the current law.
- Remove the warnings provision, have warnings issued for two years and then enforce violations.
- Increase the fine levels to an upper limit of \$1,500.00, more commensurate with the risk to lake resources.

In addition, IAS efforts need to focus on educating state and municipal law enforcement personnel about the impact of invasive aquatic plants and the enforceable provisions of the law. More effort is needed to inform vendors of plants and animals about the requirements of the current law.

V. “The status of cooperation from other state agencies in educating the public about invasive aquatic species; ”

Few agencies have programs and resources that target IAS, although several state agencies have been cooperating in limited efforts to date, notably DOC, IFW, DOT, and the Maine Turnpike Authority. The work group recommends IAS interagency cooperation focus on the following areas:

- Ensure continued willingness of all relevant state agencies to cooperate on public education and prevention.
- Continue support at the cabinet level to ensure inter-agency cooperation on prevention projects and maintain participation in an ongoing Invasive Species Committee.
- Maximize opportunities within existing state programs to promote awareness and prevention.

VI. “Recommendations for necessary funding to support the prevention and control of invasive aquatic species.”

The work group recommends IAS funding be initially focused in the following areas:

- Establish an ongoing comprehensive program to implement recommendations by funding at a first year cost of \$185,000.
- Provide a state coordinator to:
 1. Develop a comprehensive statewide “Invasive Aquatic Species Management Plan.”
 2. Implement abatement and eradication activities.
 3. Establish and implement plant-monitoring protocols for local cooperators, volunteers and state staff.
 4. Oversee local grants and contracting for services.
 5. Maximize the effectiveness of local prevention programs.

By way of perspective, the State of Vermont has less than 10% of Maine’s lake resources and a fraction of our population. That state currently spends more than the above proposed amount just on IAS staff, not to mention prevention and control funds which amounted to over six million dollars in recent years. The experience of the other New England states shows that the problem of invasive aquatic plants can outstrip other lake water quality and habitat problems within a relatively short time.

Taken as a whole, these recommendations are a balanced approach that will implement the best available prevention and control options consistent with current knowledge and balancing public and private interests.

Contact: Roy Bouchard: (207) 287-7798 or 287-3901, {fax -7191}
EEmail: roy.bouchard@state.me.us
Address: Maine Dept. Environmental Protection State House Station 17, Augusta ME 04333
DEP Website <http://janus.state.me.us/dep/home.htm>, Land and Water Quality, Lakes Page
 NRC_01_31_01